

SERMON SERIES

DISCUSSION GUIDE

STORY OF FAITH: WEEK 12

In Biblical history, approximately 400 years went by between the time of Nehemiah and the birth of Christ. This is often called the Intertestamental Period, and sometimes even the “silent” years, although they were anything but silent. From about 430 BC until John the Baptist arrived on the scene, there had been no prophetic voice heard in Israel, yet the political, social, and religious events of those centuries would undeniably shape the world of the New Testament.

After returning from exile during the days of the Persian empire, the Jews expected prosperity in their own land once again. However, their dreams of peace and autonomy did not materialize, as Israel suffered over the next four centuries under a series of foreign armies and rulers, including the Greeks, Egyptians, and eventually the Romans.

And then John showed up. He was wild and outspoken and dressed funny and ate weird things, and he began baptizing people in the Jordan River while “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). This was radical and exciting, and the people flocked to him. He denied being the Christ but claimed he was sent to prepare the way for a prophet greater than himself—One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (v.8). For more on his ministry, see John 1:1-28.

Finally, thousands of years after the promises to Abraham, Judah, and David, and hundreds of years after the prophets, it happened: Jesus arrived at the river to be baptized by John and begin His public ministry. All three persons of the Trinity were there for that spectacular event, and, as expected, John soon faded from the spotlight (see Luke 3:19-20). After his own experience in the wilderness, Jesus began proclaiming the gospel, or good news, from God.

His message was simple: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

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MARK 1:1-15 ESV

- 1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*
- 2 *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,*
- 3 *the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”*
- 4 *John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*
- 5 *And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*
- 6 *Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.*
- 7 *And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*
- 8 *I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*
- 9 *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*
- 10 *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*
- 11 *And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*
- 12 *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*
- 13 *And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*
- 14 *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,*
- 15 *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

on your own, with family, or with your small group

John the Baptist was preaching a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” What does this mean and why was it so radical?

Read John 1:6-9, 15-34. What can you say about John’s mission and his devotion to that mission? What do we learn about his character? How can we be more like John today?

What is the significance of both John the Baptist and Jesus spending time in the wilderness (or desert) before their respective public ministries?

Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled” (Mark 3:15). What did He mean by this? And how does it fit into the Story of Faith so far?

Jesus also said to “believe in the gospel” (Mark 3:15). What is the gospel? And how is the good news inseparable from His arrival on the scene?